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ABSTRACT

Almost every profession has capitalized on the computerized processing of data. High school counselors in particular, require quick and accurate access to career information and though such technology can be expensive, it may be less prohibitive than adding additional staff. This study examines how school counselors utilize computers in their counseling programs. Seventy school counselors, representing grades kindergarten through post high school, returned questionnaires formulated for this study. Survey results indicated broad computer utilization by the respondents. Elementary counselors used computers for record keeping, printing projects, bibliotherapy, and calendar events. Middle or junior high school counselors employed computers for career information, limited remedial work, daily attendance, and calendar events, while high school counselors use computers for career awareness and gathering information on post-high school degree programs. Counselors at all grade levels used computers for word processing. Other uses of the computer included documenting counseling sessions and maintaining various records, such as grades and daily attendance. Although most counselors expressed optimism concerning computer utilization, many expressed concern about the need for more in-service training. Participant remarks suggest that counselors will continue to broaden their computer use as time and resources allow. Appendices contain a survey sample, software information, and statistical summaries. Contains five references. (RJM)

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COUNSELORS AND COMPUTERS:

A SURVEY OF COMPATIBILITY AND USE

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Introduction

Almost every profession has attempted to capitalize on its ability to process a large quantity of information with the use of computer technology. The field of education is no exception. Nationally, it is estimated that nearly ninety-five percent of schools utilize a computer in some capacity or another, while in the state of Indiana the percentage of schools using computers may reach as high as ninety-eight percent (Sid Fennig, Technology Coordinator, North Adams Community Schools, personal communication, April 1993). Classrooms are becoming computer literate as computer use branches out to include many areas of instruction. High school business and science departments, art instructors and elementary physical educators have tapped into this technology. Elementary educators are using computer technology for storing fitness testing data, record keeping, print shop, and drawing. Guidance counselors are finding more uses for computer in their daily activities. Administrative packages have been designed to assist the counselor with tracking (G.P.A.'s), scheduling, word processing, and accessing a variety of data are also being developed/upgraded and utilized.

High school counselors engaged in intensive career awareness education require quick and accurate access of information related to careers (Maze, 1985). Maze suggests that comprehensive computer guidance programs are expensive but the overall cost of adding computer technology to a counseling program is less than adding an additional staff person to undertake career awareness responsibilities. This may be a crucial focal point of interest as current state funding may be shifting from the state level to individual local school systems. The addition of computer technology may be less prohibitive than adding additional staff to a counseling program.

Counselors are viewed by many to be caring, empathetic individuals. Can the same sense of empathy and personal communication be conveyed by a computer terminal? This answer depends on how taxpayers view the job responsibility of school counselors, i.e. discuss issues with students, or provide the resources computers can be providing. In a study of students in Virginia who used computers to access career information, 83.9 percent of those students reported discussing careers with their parents after computer use, indirectly promoting parent/child communication (Hedrick and McDaniel, 1987). A student may have many more career possibilities to discuss with his/her parents because of computer use. Any student can access career information pertaining to thousands of post-high school programs in the nation, including occupational information, and future job predictions.

COMPUTER USE: Beyond careers

Computer use by school counselors is not limited to career awareness. Stone, Thompson, and Lacount (1989) surveyed high school counselors with the following results: 79 percent of respondansts use computers to gather information related to careers and colleges, 68 percent use computers for attendance, 62 percent for scheduling, 47 percent for recording and maintaining grades, 60 percent use computers for word processing, and 22 percent utilize computers for managing guidance records. Waltz (1983) categorized computer use by counselors in one of four areas: CAC (computer-assisted counseling), CAI (computer-assisted instruction), CMC (computer-managed counseling), and CMI (computer-managed instruction). Various programs may be self-directed in nature allowing a student to work at his/her own pace (CAI). Would counselors like to use computers to aid in their counseling strategies? Bluhm and Kirshner (1988) surveyed counselors and found that 81 percent believe that computers should be used for CMI. In contrast, 80.2 percent of counselors surveyed stated that little use should be made of computers within a counseling program. When considering computer-assisted

instruction, 88.5 percent believe that computers would be a benefit. Considering the issue of confidentiality, 26 percent agreed that there may exist a problem in maintaining confidentiality, while 47.7 percent felt comfortable that using a computer would not interfere with confidentiality in any way. A total of 85.5 percent of the counselors surveyed agreed that they would like to use a computer with their students.

If human beings try something new or have a certain level of success with whatever they're attempting, they may be willing to continue with the activity. This is true when considering the introduction of a computer to a counseling program. In a study involving eighty-six Maine high school counselors, the subjects were generally positive toward the application of computers. This number may increase as counselors obtain knowledge and comfort in using computer technology.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to gain information pertaining to how school counselors utilize computers in their counseling programs. Specific questions were complied in survey format (Appendix A). The author expected to find high school counselors utilizing computers for career awareness and/or gathering job opportunity data with limited emphasis on word processing. Counselors would use computers at the elementary level for word processing, and creative *Print Shop*- type programs. Middle school and/or junior high school counselors would strike a balance of computer use between word processing and career guidance.

SAMPLE

The sample for this study consisted of school counselors, representing grades K-12 and post-high school. Respondents returned 70 surveys for an overall response rate of 65 percent. Counselors participating in this survey were arranged into three primary geographical regions: west central, central, and northeastern Indiana. Of those counselors participating in this survey 18 (25.71 percent) were male and 52 (74.29 percent) were female. The distribution of school counselors in relationship to specific grade levels were evenly mixed throughout the three geographical regions. Ages of the counselors responding to the survey were: 25-35, 9 (12.86 percent); 35-45, 28 (40.50 percent); 45-55, 24 (34.29 percent); 55-65, 7 (10.00 percent); and two not responding.

INSTRUMENT

This survey was developed by using a panel of experts method. Six experienced counselors familiar with the use of computers in their occupations were asked to examine the survey in draft form and offer suggestions for additions, deletions, and revisions of any type. The survey was revised and returned to the group for final revision and clarity. The purpose of the survey was to determine how school counselors are utilizing computers. The survey consisted of six demographic questions and eleven short-answer questions regarding computer use for a total of seventeen questions. Some short-answer questions could be answered with a "Yes" or "No." Examples of specific questions ranged from: "Do you currently have a computer in your office?" to "Briefly describe how you would best utilize a computer in your counseling program if you had one (computer)."

PROCEDURE

Surveys were distributed at the annual Indiana Counseling Association conference, and in a separate mailing after the conference. During the conference, members were greeted and asked if they would like to participate in a computer survey. Respondents were to return the completed survey to the registration table, where there was a box marked 'Computer Survey.' Aadditional surveys were mailed, following the conference, to three geographic localities within the state: northeast, central, and southwest-central. The author pulled names for the mailing from the membership list of counselors belonging to Indiana School Counselor Association. Those who received a mailed copy of the survey were instructed not to participate if they had already completed a survey at the conference

RESULTS

Specific demographic data in this survey *(see Table 1)* indicate more female counselors than male counselors by almost three-to-one. Marital status of respondents showed a majority of respondents were married. The majority of working counselors were between the ages of twenty-five

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Insert Table 1 about here

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to thirty-five (40.00 percent). The next highest age range was forty-five to fifty-five years old (34.29 percent). Younger and older age groups were included with minimal significance. The education level of the respondents indicated a high percentage (72.86) hold a Master's degree.

Other items were included to determine the size, location, and enrollment *(see Table 2)* of the respondent's school. Twenty-four respondents (34.29 percent) indicated their total school to be between 600-1,000 students. Twenty respondents (28.57 percent) stated their school enrollment fell

between 350-600 students. Counselors working in schools with less than 350 students represented less than 14 percent of the survey.

Insert Table 2 about here

Twenty-five (36.71 percent) of the counselor's schools were in an urban setting. Twenty-one (30.00 percent) of the respondent's schools were in a rural area, while fifteen (21.34 percent) work in a suburban area. The majority of counselors (22) indicated their school was in a city with a population between 50,000 and 100,000. Ten counselors indicated that they work in a community size of 2,000-10,000.

Insert Table 3 about here

The next grouping of questions (that could be answered by checking "Yes" or "No") were included to determine specific information about computer availability, and general computer related issues. The percentage of counselors who do have a computer in their office compared to those who do not was almost evenly split. Many respondents were interested in having a computer in their office. Counselors were asked whether or not they had access to a computer that could be utilized in their counseling program(s). The majority of counselors didn't respond to this item. Two other primary areas of concern were software and the issue of broken confidentiality if someone else would have access to their computer. While counseling-related software may be a new item for counselors to adapt to, the majority of respondents (45.71 percent) affirmed general acceptance of counselor-

related software. Considering confidentiality, the majority of respondents (51.43 percent) claimed that they were not concerned about confidentiality being broken if someone else accessed their computer. Suggestions from respondents regarding maintaining confidentiality yielded solutions such as: separate disks, coding names, and/or assigning specific numbers to individual students or groups.

DISCUSSION

The results of this survey indicate broad computer utilization by the respondents. A breakdown by grade levels indicates elementary counselors use computers for record keeping, printing projects, bibliotherapy, and calendar events. Middle or junior high school counselors outline computer use in areas of career information, limited remedial work, daily attendance, and calendar events. High school counselors use computers for career awareness and gathering information pertaining to post-high school degree programs. Counselors at all grade levels use computers for word processing. Counselors responding to the checklist items of computer use responded as follows: documenting counseling sessions (57.14 percent), record keeping such as tracking grades and G.P.A.'s (47.14 percent), calendar events (42.85 percent), and career awareness or career guidance (54.28 percent). This survey also indicates that 15.91 percent of counselors use computers for daily attendance, and 21.42 percent utilize computers for some type of bibliotherapy. Although the actual percentage of counselors having a computer in their office was a little over half of the respondents (52.86 percent), most counselors expressed optimism concerning computer utilization. While response supporting computer use appears high, concerns were expressed by counselors pertaining to needing more in-service training to know how to effectively utilize their computer(s). This study parallels Bluhm and Kirshner's 1988 study regarding confidentiality. Both surveys indicate counselors are not overwhelmingly concerned about a breech in confidentiality. Maintaining

confidentiality can be accomplished using creative logging, and/or separate disks rather than storing counseling session information on a computer's hard drive. Summaries of remarks made by counselors in this survey affirmed that counselors will continue to broaden computer use in their own program only by attending as many workshops and inservice sessions as time and resources will allow. In doing so, their computer will become a necessary tool in their office, rather than another piece of equipment that needs dusting twice a year.

LIMITATIONS

This study was not intended to be an extensive view of computer use among counselors in Indiana plublic schools, but rather a brief overview pertaining to how school counselors are utilizing utilizing computer technology. The list of computer software that appears in Appendix B is extremely limited. A counselor wanting software information should first consult his/her media specialist for further information about counseling-related software.

REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY SAMPLE

Dear Counselor:

I am examining how computers are utilized in counseling programs. Please take a few moments to complete this internal survey. Also, feel free to make any additional comments that you feel may help me understand how computers may best serve counselors. When finished, place the survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope and drop it in the mail. Thank you for your cooperation.

Greg Hardesty
Northwest Elementary School, Counselor
Decatur, IN 46733

City you work in _____ State _____

PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

Sex
___ Male
___ Female

Educational Level
___ B.S.
___ M.S.
___ ACSW
___ Ed.D.
___ Ph.D.
___ Other___

School Enrollment
___ 0-200
___ 200-350
___ 350-600
___ 600-1,000
___ over 1,000

Marital Status
___ Single
___ Married

Age
___ 20-25
___ 25-35
___ 35-45
___ 45-55
___ 55-65

Community Size
___ 0-2,000
___ 2,000-10,000
___ 10,000-20,000
___ 20,000-50,000
___ 50,000-100,000
___ over 100,000

School Community
___ Urban (city)
___ Rural (country)
___ Suburban (near city)

	YES	NO
Do you currently have a computer in your office?	___	___
If not, do you have access to a computer that you could use for counseling related work?	___	___
If you don't have access to a computer, or don't have one, would you like to have a computer?	___	___
Are you satisfied with the current administrative/counseling software that is available?	___	___
Are you concerned about confidentiality being broken if someone else has access to your computer?	___	___

How long have you been a counselor?_____

What formal training have you had in computer use?_____
_____

Do you have a personal computer at home (yes or no)?_____

Is your work computer a: MacIntosh, IBM, Apple, other?___
(circle one)
_____

I use a computer or would use a computer if I had one for:
___ daily attendance
___ documenting counseling sessions
___ record keeping (grades, G.P.A., etc. . .)
___ calendar events
___ career guidance (Choices, S.I.G., etc. . .)
___ remedial work
___ play therapy
___ bibliotherapy
___ other (please explain)_____
_____
_____
_____

To what grade(s) does the above information apply?_____

Additional comments:_____
_____
_____
_____

THANK YOU

APPENDIX B

Software Information

Nearly 55 percent of counselors surveyed either didn't respond or responded "No" to the questions pertaining to familiarity with current administrative/counseling software. The following represents a brief starting point for gathering counseling-related software information. All sources are taken from 1993 catalogs.

Source	Phone Number
The American Counseling Association, Counseling Resource Catalog	1-800-347-664
NIMCO Drug Free software catalog	1-800-962-6662
Tom Snyder Productions Educational Technology Catalog	1-800-342-0236
Educational Media Corporation-Elementary Guidance and Counseling Catalog	1-800-966-3382
CFKR Career Materials	1-800-525-5626
MACRO Educational Systems	1-800-622-7648

Table 1

	Sex	Marital Status	Age	Education Level
Male	18 (25.71%)			
Female	52 (74.29%)			
Single		13 (18.57%)		
Married		56 (80.00%)		
25-35 (Age)			9 (12.86%)	
35-45			28 (40.00%)	
45-55			24 (34.29%)	
55-65			7 (10.00%)	
B.S.				6 (8.57%)
M.S.				51 (72.86%)
A.C.S.W.				1 (1.43%)
Ed.D.				4 (5.71%)
Ph.D.				8 (11.43%)
No Response		1 (1.43%)	2 (2.86%)	

(Note: N = 70)

Table 2

	School Enrollment	School Community	Community Size
Students:			
0-200	2 (2.86%)		
200-350	8 (11.43%)		
350-600	20 (28.57%)		
600-1,000	24 (34.29%)		
>1,000	15 (21.43%)		
Principality of Work:			
Urban		25 (36.71%)	
Rural		21 (30.00%)	
Suburban		15 (21.43%)	
Comm. Size in Thousands:			
0-2			6 (8.57%)
2-10			10 (14.29%)
10-20			5 (7.14%)
20-50			5 (7.14%)
50-100			22 (31.43%)
>100			7 (10.00%)
No response			15 (21.43%)

(Note: N = 70)

Table 3

	Yes	No	No Response
Do you currently have a computer in your office?	37 (52.86%)	32 (45.71%)	1
If not, do you have access to a computer that could be used for counseling-related work?	27 (38.57%)	9 (12.86%)	34 (48.51%)
If you don't have access to a computer, or don't have one, would you like to have a computer?	17 (24.29%)	7 (10.00%)	46 (65.11%)
Are you satisfied with the current administrative/counseling software that is available?	32 (45.71%)	15 (21.43%)	23 (32.86%)
Are you concerned about confidentiality being broken if someone else has access to your computer?	28 (40.00%)	36 (51.43%)	6 (11.66%)

(Note: N = 70)